

CHAPTER 2

LOVE OF MAN TO GOD

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A) LOVE OF MAN TO GOD IS THE ECHO OF HIS LOVE TO MAN

Love of God to Man throughout the ages shines in His care for His creatures captivating countless numbers of souls. In every generation there were souls who loved Him and lived in His obedience, even when the world was sinking in the darkness of idolatry.

From the descendant of Adam, Abel was righteous. Then there was Enoch the righteous, as the Holy Bible portrayed him: "Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him" (Genesis 5:24; Hebrews 11:5). Among the righteous people in the past, there were men who pleased God by their faith such as Abraham who - in his love and obedience to God - presented his only son Isaac as a sacrifice. Then there were Isaac and Jacob the father of the tribes, Joseph the upright, Moses who spoke with God and who "refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward" (Hebrews 11:24-26).

According to the expression of the Apostle Paul: "For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets: who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. And others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection ... of whom the world was not worthy" (Hebrews 11:32-38).

Some of those righteous people mentioned above lived before the time of the Law, and yet lived faithful to God, loving Him and obeying their consciences. When God gave written commandments at the hands of Moses, He specified the first four of the ten commandments for Himself. These are which the Lord Jesus summarized in: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind" (Matthew 22:37). In the past God said: "My son, give me your heart, and let your eyes observe My ways" (Proverbs 23:26). It is known that the heart holds in itself love and compassion.

In the thirty first Psalm, the Prophet and Psalmist David empties his feelings of love, gratitude and gratefulness to his God and calls everyone to the love of God saying: "**Oh, love the Lord, all you His saints!**" (Psalm 31:23). In another Psalm he says: "**Delight yourself also in the Lord, and He shall give you the desires of your heart**" (Psalm 37:4). Again in a song of love, as if he is talking to every human soul, David says: "**Listen, O daughter, consider and incline your ear; forget your own people also, and your father's house; So the King will greatly desire your beauty; because He is your Lord, worship Him**" (Psalm 45:10, 11).

In yet another Psalm David says: "**My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and**

fatness, and my mouth shall praise You with joyful lips. When I remember You on my bed, I meditate on You in the night watches" (Psalm 63:5, 6). Again he says: "You hold me by my right hand. You will guide me with Your counsel, and afterward receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You" (Psalm 73:23-25). "You who love the Lord, hate evil! He preserves the souls of His saints; He delivers them out of the hand of the wicked. Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart. Rejoice in the Lord, you righteous, and give thanks at the remembrance of His holy name" (Psalm 97:10-12).

The book "Song of Solomon" in the Old Testament speaks very clearly about the love of God to the human soul. It does so in symbolic expressions, making God as the groom and the human soul as the bride.

That was in the Old Testament. But as soon as the light of the New Testament shined upon the world, by the manifestation of the Sun of Righteousness, Jesus Christ our Lord, the Incarnated Love, God presented His love in its fullness in the person of His Son. This love was richly poured out by the Holy Spirit in the hearts of the believers (Romans 5:5). This love had an indescribable profound effect in inflaming their hearts towards He Who loved them and gave Himself for them (Galatians 2:20). Hence it is true that the love of the believer is an echo of His love to them: "We love Him because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19).

Christian love is unique in its kind and in its depth, not like the love which the people of the world are acquainted with. The world knows love as a virtue. Yet it differs greatly from Christian love. Christian love which we mean is not born from an emotion of the flesh, but it is from God Himself: "The love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us" (Romans 5:5). It was the Holy Spirit Who was poured out in the day of Pentecost on the early believers in the early Church and inflamed their lives with faith, love and holiness. He descended on them as tongues as if from fire. Fire in some ways is a sign of power and inflamed love: "For love is as strong as death ... ; its flames are flames of fire, a most vehement flame. Many waters cannot quench love, nor can the floods drown it" (Song 8:6-8).

The love of God was strong and is still a fire which inflames the hearts of those who love Him and compels them to come near Him. "For the love of Christ compels us" (2 Corinthians 5:14). This confirms what Christ said: "I give to you; not as the world gives" (John 14:27).

I cannot find words more factual and compelling about the strength of Christian love in the heart of the believer than what the Apostle Paul said in his Epistle to the Romans: "**Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:35-39).**

He who wrote the "Song of Solomon" said in the past "Love is as strong as death" (Song 8:6). Yet in Christianity - in the person of Christ, by Him and by the work of the Holy Spirit - love became **stronger than death. Love through the Cross defeated death, and up till now, wherever the Cross is, love is found, because it is the sign of love which defeated death, conquered Hades, and scorned disgrace, shame and pain.**

The Apostle Paul whose heart was filled with love towards Christ, when the believers of Caesarea pleaded with him not to go up to Jerusalem fearing for his life after the Prophet Agabus prophesied that trials and tribulations were awaiting him, Paul answered them: "What do you mean by weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 21:10-13). **It is true that the love in the heart of Paul was stronger than the death which was awaiting him. He was dead to the world and alive to Christ Who filled his being and occupied his feelings.**

What do I say about the confessors and the martyrs who loved God more than themselves (Revelation 12:11). **The testimony of the blood is the greatest testimony to the most superior love** "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends" (John 15:13). The greatest promises did not tempt them and the threats of the rulers and the cruelty of the torturers did not scare them. This was for no reason other than their exceeding love to Christ Who was living in them. They showed amazing courage and withstood incredible pains. This was proof that the love in them surpassed all earthly love, and was above the world and everything in it.

What do I say about the ascetic fathers and the monks - because of their great love to Christ - they mortified themselves, their members and their desires. By their own will, they died to the world and all that is in it. Let us listen to a sweet melody from one of the ascetic monks; **Father John Saba, known as the Spiritual Elder**, in which he converses with God:

"Who would not be surprised from the depth of Your mysteries which are beyond comprehension? While You are One in Yourself, You dwell inside thousands and tens of thousands of Your saints and those who do Your will, without being divided or partitioned.

Every one who loves You thinks that You are his alone, as he feels that he belongs to nobody except You. He thinks that You dwell in him alone and that he is worthy for Your dwelling, although You fill heaven and earth. Every one sees You whole in him as if in a mirror.

Let us welcome You inside our inner temple, in order to see You, enjoy You and eat from the tree of life which produce fruits inside us. **Lord, give me Your love, though I do not deserve the familiarity of love by which I call You "Father".**

The door is open and no one is coming in. Your glory is obvious but no one is looking at it. Your light is shining in our eyes and no one is enjoying it. Your hand is stretched to give and no

one is taking. You are calling with a loud voice and no one is hearing. You warn and advise and no one cares.

Give fuel to the fire of my heart which You ignited with Your love. Dear Good Lord abolish the love of the world from my heart, and replace it with my love to You. Qualify me Lord, that my heart melts in Your love and fear like the rocks when they are crushed. Open my heart like the graves which opened, that my soul rises from its sleep, like the dead who were raised at the frightening hour of Your crucifixion.

Blessed is he who never talks about the world, in order to talk with You, escapes from the sun to enjoy Your light, closes his door in order for You to open Your door, and keep away from people in order to sit with You.

Lord, make from my small heart a heaven for Your dwelling, in order that I raise my voice with joy like the heavenly creatures, and offer You continuous sacrifices of thanksgiving and praises on the altar of my heart".

Let us also listen to a sweet melody about love from **a ministering Bishop who lived an ascetic life; the saint and philosopher Augustine:**

"Lord, I know You because You have known me and I love You because You loved me. You are the joy of my soul, come near me for my soul to be filled from the source of Your love, because the comfort of my heart is in You. Make me eager for Your love, for You are my life. You, the Heavenly Groom, do not keep me far from You when I approach You and encompass me with Your arms.

Lord, purify my senses, and make them worthy to taste and sense the sweetness of joy which You offer for everyone who wants to enjoy the fragrance of Your giving. Make me fond of You always.

Give me a heart which beats with Your love, a soul which desires You, a spirit which clings to You, a mind which thinks in You always and unites with Your wisdom and knows how to love You, You are love full of every wisdom. In You love and perfection abide. Everyone who knows You loves You, he loves You more than himself, and leaves everything and follows You.

As the deer rush towards the current of sweet waters to satisfy their thirst, likewise my soul is thirsty for You Lord Who quenches the flames of my desires. Yes, my soul is thirsty for You, Who is the Source of Life always. Make me drunk with the joy of Your sweetness?!"

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We have talked in some length about the love of man to God in general, and presented samples of meditations of a number of the men of God who loved Him, His love was their food, drink, and clothes. We now proceed to other points about the love of man to God

B) VALUE OF LOVE IN THE SIGHT OF GOD

God is love itself - "God is Love" (1 John 4:8; 4:16), and it is love which brought the Son of God from heaven down to our world. Also it is the first and greatest commandment (Mark 12:28, 30), the first Christian virtue and is greater than faith (1 Corinthians 13:13) without which it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6). It is greater than hope (1 Corinthians 13:13) in which we were saved (Romans 8:24). **Hence if love is so powerful, no doubt, it is the virtue which pleases God, that he who abides in love abides in God and God abides in him (1 John 4:16), and he who does not love does not know God (1 John 4:8).**

In the past God said to His people: "And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you, **but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways and to love Him**" (Deuteronomy 10:12). The wise Solomon said "**If a man would give for love all the wealth of his house, it would be utterly despised**" (Song 8:7). This is the value of love in the sight of God.

In the life of the Lord Jesus, we read about a Pharisee called Simon who invited Him to a feast in his house. And behold, a woman in the city who was a sinner (an adulteress), when she knew that Jesus sat at the table in the Pharisee's house brought an alabaster flask of fragrant oil and stood at His feet behind Him weeping; and she began to wash His feet with her tears and wipe them with the hair of her head; and she kissed His feet and anointed them with the fragrant oil.

Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, he had some thoughts in his head which he did not reveal! Jesus knowing his thoughts, told him a parable "There was a certain creditor who had two debtors. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing with which to repay, he freely forgave them both. **"Tell Me, therefore, which of them will love him more?" Simon answered and said: "I suppose the one whom he forgave more"**. Then Jesus started to make comparison between the way this Pharisee dealt with Him concerning the formalities of hospitality and the way which this sinful woman behaved to show her repentance. **Jesus ended His talk saying: "Therefore I say to you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much"** (Luke 7:36-47).

This sinful woman showed an amazing love to the Saviour, whom she believed could free her from her sins and grant her peace. She did not utter a word, but by her tears and kissing the Saviour's feet and the fragrant oil by which she wiped them expressed her amazing love, which won for her - forgiveness, salvation and inner peace "Your sins are forgiven ... Your faith has saved you.

Go in peace" (Luke 7:48-50).

We all know **about the tragedy of the Apostle Peter who by cursing and swearing denied the Saviour** (Mark 14:66-72). After the Holy Resurrection, the Lord showed Himself to some of His Disciples and Peter with them at the Sea of Tiberias where the Lord asked Peter: **"Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?"**. He repeated this question three times. The answer of Peter each time was: "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You" (John 21:15-17). It is a strange attitude from the Lord Jesus, as if He is begging the love of Peter! **There is nothing that gratifies the heart of God more than love.**

In the Book of Revelation, the Lord Jesus sent a message to the angel and minister of the Church of Ephesus in which He said:

"I know your works, your labor, your patience, ... and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary. **Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love.** Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place-- unless you repent" (Revelation 2:2-5). **Consider the value of love in the sight of God: The minister of the Church of Ephesus had good works, labor, patience, and perseverance in the ministry for the Lord's sake. All what the Lord found against him is that he had left his first love!**

What is the first love which the Lord points to? The first love is the strong personal bond which ties a person to his God, whose basis, subject and aim is love. Works have no value without love. "Many will say to Me in that day: "Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?" And then I will declare to them: "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!" (Matthew 7:22, 23). **Real love searches for the beloved. God awaits love searching for Him, and for Him alone. There is nothing which satisfies the heart of Christ more than love to Him.**

St. Augustine says: "What was the question which the Lord posed to Peter after the Resurrection other than "Do you love Me?" Was it not enough to pose this question once and not three times? Three times fear denied and three times love confessed. Here Peter loves the Lord, but what would he do to the Lord? Whatever you offer to the Lord, you have received from the Lord in return".

We should know that God wants to be loved for His sake and not for His gifts. One of the fathers once said: "Lord, My glory is to please You, and my agony is to see You insulted by me. If I am appalled from hell, it would not be because of the tortures in it, but because its inhabitants are Your enemies. And if I love heavenly glory it is not for my sake, but because those who enjoy it are those who love You. Lord, Your glory is for those who love You. The Apostle Paul says: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him" (1 Corinthians 2:9)". **It is true that the glories of God are alone for those who love Him.**

We know how hard the betrayal of Judas His Disciple was on the heart of Jesus. To add to the cruelty of the situation, Judas made from a kiss, which expresses love, a sign by which he delivered Him to His enemies! All the Lord did was to say a word of reproach to Judas: "Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?" (Luke 22:48).

In a story about St. Bimen, who was one of the great fathers of the desert, a venter of fish used to visit him and was accustomed to stay every Sunday with him in the desert. One day, St. Bimen asked him to say a word of benefit to the brethren the monks. After resisting because of shyness, he yielded and said: "There were three friends of a certain man. He wanted to visit the king of the land but he was not competent to do so, so he asked his friends to go with him. The first friend promised to accompany him half the way only; the second friend promised to accompany him to the door of the king's palace; the third friend agreed to go with him all the way, enter the palace and speak on his behalf to the king".

The venter then explained these words: "The first friend refers to asceticism without love "And though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing" (1 Corinthians 13:3). The second friend refers to holiness without which nobody can see God (Hebrews 12:12). **But the third friend is love the greatest of all virtues, without which no one will benefit from his striving whatever it is, and however great his sacrifices are.**

C) WHY SHOULD MAN LOVE GOD?

1 - BECAUSE THE HAPPINESS OF MAN IS IN GOD, AND HIS SOUL WILL NOT REST EXCEPT IN HIM:

Love of man to God is the source of his happiness, indeed the happiness of the human race. If love is taken out of society, injustice, deception, corruption, hypocrisy, stealing, embezzlement, fraud, betrayal, evil doing and wars will spread. These will undoubtedly cause hardships, catastrophes, dangers and iniquities for the members of the society. God in His supreme wisdom provides everything that can bring happiness to man. And when He commanded us to love, and to love Him with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our mind, that was not because He is in need of our love, but to give man all that makes him happy. This love is affirmed by the word "**all**" each time, which shows the necessity of love to man.

The Book of Ecclesiastes says: "Then the dust will return to the earth as it was, **and the spirit will return to God who gave it**" (Ecclesiastes 12:7). **And since the spirit is from God, it does not get rest except in Him. The Psalmist says: "Return to your rest, O my soul"** (Psalm

116:7).

St. Augustine who lived the life of sin and impurity to its depth, and then experienced the life of grace to its superiority, said in his confessions, talking to God: "**Lord You created us for Yourself, and our souls will not get comfort until they rest in You**". These words agree with the saying of the Lord Jesus: "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). Christ, Who created man knows his nature that he will not find rest far from Him. He called all who labor to come to Him to give them rest, knowing that rest is under His wings and in the life with Him.

There is no rest for man except in God his creator, and his spirit will not rest except in Him. The dove which Noah sent from the Ark to check the dryness of the land after the flood, found no resting place for the sole of her foot, and returned back into the Ark (Genesis 8:9). Likewise, the meek soul created in the image of God in goodness and true holiness, does not find rest except in Him. He is our fullness as He is the bread of life, our living water, and the only way to the Father. He is the delight of our life as He is the light of the world and the good shepherd Who leads us to the source of living water.

2 - FOR ALL HIS BENEFITS:

The Prophet and Psalmist David says: "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits" (Psalm 103:2). He then mentions some of these benefits: "**Who forgives all your iniquities, who heals all your diseases, Who redeems your life from destruction, Who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies, Who satisfies your mouth with good things, so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's... He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor punished us according to our iniquities... As a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear Him**" (Psalm 103:3-13). The Psalmist also says: "**What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits toward me? I will take up the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord**" (Psalm 116:12, 13).

St. Augustine comments on the above verses by saying: "The Psalmist who said this Psalm, showed how great were the deeds which the Lord did with him. He also searched for what he should render to the Lord, and found nothing! Because whatever you give, it is what you already got from the Lord in return. What did the Psalmist find to render to the Lord for all His benefits? Take up the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord. Who gave him the cup of salvation, except He Who wants him to render to Him something for His benefits".

The Prophet Jeremiah says: "This I recall to my mind, therefore I have hope. Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed, **because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness**" (Lamentations 3:21-23). "**He gives to all life, breath, and all things... for in Him we live and move and have our being**" (Acts 17:25, 28).

From the beginning God displayed Himself to Moses as **"merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin"** (Exodus 34:6, 7). He also said on the tongue of Prophet Isaiah **"For the mountains shall depart and the hills be removed, but My kindness shall not depart from you, nor shall My covenant of peace be removed, says the Lord, who has mercy on you"** (Isaiah 54:10). And the Prophet David speaks to God and says: **"Remember, O Lord, Your tender mercies and Your lovingkindness, for they are from of old"** (Psalm 25:6).

3 - FOR HIS AMAZING LOVINGKINDNESS

The amazing lovingkindness of God gets complete hold of man. He is like a father who is kind to his children, and like the bird who gathers its offsprings. The Lord Jesus, grieving over Jerusalem said: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you were not willing!" (Luke 13:34).

He has not dealt with man according to his sins, nor punished him according to his iniquities (Psalm 103:10). God says by the Prophet Isaiah: "For a mere moment I have forsaken you, but with great mercies I will gather you. With a little wrath I hid My face from you for a moment; but with everlasting kindness I will have mercy on you, says the Lord, your Redeemer" (Isaiah 54:7, 8). And He says to the Prophet Moses: "For the Lord your God is a merciful God, He will not forsake you nor destroy you, nor forget the covenant of your fathers which He swore to them" (Deuteronomy 4:31).

Solomon said in the prayer of consecrating the Altar: **"Lord God ..., there is no God in heaven above or on earth below like You, who keep Your covenant and mercy with Your servants who walk before You with all their hearts"** (1 Kings 8:23). And the Psalmist says: **"Lord, You have been favorable to Your land; ... You have forgiven the iniquity of Your people; you have covered all their sins. You have taken away all Your wrath; you have turned from the fierceness of Your anger"** (Psalm 85:1-3). God in His lovingkindness also says: **"I have stretched out My hands all day long to a rebellious people, who walk in a way that is not good, according to their own thoughts"** (Isaiah 65:2).

The Lord Jesus says about the lovingkindness of God: "For He is kind to the unthankful and evil" (Luke 6:35). And St. Paul says "when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared ..." (Titus 3:4), and calls Him in another place "The Father of mercies" (2 Corinthians 1:3). **When all the doors are shut in our faces, God's door always remains open and will not shut in the face of the most evil person, " ... the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out"** (John 6:37).

The sick man of Bethesda who had an infirmity thirty-eight years was asked by Christ

"Do you want to be made well?" The sick man answered Him, "Sir, I have no man" (John 5:6, 7), for this reason Christ came to him. Christ is the helper for he who has no help and the hope for he who has no hope. Again the woman who had a flow of blood for twelve years, and had suffered many things from many physicians, had spent all that she had and was no better, but rather grew worse (Mark 5:25, 26). As soon as she touched the garment of Christ she was healed. When the world aggravates or annoys us from any side, we find the eternal arms of Christ opened to carry and enclose us.

God meets our sins with love, kindness and mercy. No wonder He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor punished us according to our iniquities (Psalm 103:10). Peter has denied Him cursing and swearing that he did not know Him. After that a rooster crowed, and Peter remembered the words of the Saviour and he went out and wept bitterly (Matthew 26:74, 75). **What happened after that? Christ met him after His Resurrection and asked him three times "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?" And when he answered with the affirmative, Jesus told him "Feed My lambs" (John 21:15). Christ restored him back to his Apostolic status after denying Him. Was this the right reward for a Disciple who had denied, cursed and sworn?**

Saul of Tarsus (The Apostle Paul) who persecuted the Church of God in excess and was destroying her, who used to bring the Christians bound to the prisons, and said about himself "I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man" (1 Timothy 1:13), Christ dealt gently with him. Christ met him near Damascus and asked him: "Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" (Acts 9:4), and when Saul replied: "Lord, what do You want me to do?" (Acts 9:6), the Lord made him a chosen vessel of Him, to bear His name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel (Acts 9:15), he was truly an Apostle for the whole world. He is our kind God Who does not deal with us according to our deeds and many sins.

4 - OUR LACK OF LOVE TO GOD IS AN INSULT TO HIM

Our lack of love to God in response to His love is considered an insult to Him. In more than one place in both the Old and the New Testaments Christ presents Himself as the groom and the human soul as the bride. The Holy Bible contains a whole book; Song of Solomon, in which God presents His love to us in a symbolic picture as the love of the groom and the bride. He also presents it in the New Testament in more than one place as in the parable of the Ten Virgins (Matthew 25:1-13).

Christ has betrothed us to Himself: "For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ" (2 Corinthians 11:2). **The Groom wants His bride to be for Him, and for Him alone. She is not to look to someone else, nor to give her love to another. As God is the Groom for our souls, He wants us totally to Himself, and He considers our lack of loving Him as an insult to Him.**

From the expressions which God used in the Old Testament to portray His people who used

to deviate from His worship to other worships: **"My people played the harlot with other gods"** (Judges 2:17), **indicating that they gave their love to other gods, or belonged to other gods.** St. Paul says: "if, while her husband lives, she (a woman) marries another man, she will be called an adulteress" (Romans 7:3).

5 - LOVE OF MAN TO GOD MAKES HIM FEEL THE INSIGNIFICANT AND TRIVIALITY OF THE WORLD

The person who loves God is always occupied by Him, his desires are to heaven, and consequently desires a better world, i.e., a heavenly one (Hebrews 11:16). St. Paul says "So we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord... We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord" (2 Corinthians 5:6, 8). He also expressed his desires by saying "... having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better" (Philippians 1:23).

When Simeon the Elder took the Child Jesus in his arms in the Temple, he blessed God, and said: "Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word; For my eyes have seen Your salvation" (Luke 2:29, 30). The Psalmist says: "Woe is me, that I dwell in Meshech, that I dwell among the tents of Kedar!" (Psalm 120:5), and "I am a stranger in the earth; do not hide Your commandments from me" (Psalm 119:19). When Jacob stood in front of the Pharaoh of Egypt, the Pharaoh asked him "How old are you?", he answered: "The days of the years of my pilgrimage are one hundred and thirty years; few and evil" (Genesis 47:8, 9).

Solomon who was the wisest among all the people of his time, after experiencing all worldly affairs said: "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity. What profit has a man from all his labor in which he toils under the sun?" (Ecclesiastes 1:1, 2).

The saints and righteous people became ascetic and lived like outsiders and strangers for the love of Christ the King because of their feeling of the triviality of the present world. The more the love of man to Christ grows, the more man detests everything in the world. **By that we understand the words of the Apostle: "Do not love the world or the things in the world"** (1 John 2:15).

6 - LOVE OF MAN GUARDS HIM AGAINST FALLING

Love binds the person to whom he loves, whether the beloved is present or absent. The deeper the love is, the stronger it holds his feelings and senses. **If this kind of love is between a person and God, the person feels himself always in the presence of God, in any place and at all times. He converses with Him, is careful to do what pleases Him, and avoids what displeases Him.** This love protects the person from falling into "the sin which so easily ensnares us" (Hebrews 12:1).

The words of the Prophet David: "**I have set the Lord always before me**; because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved" (Psalm 16:8), express his deep love to God, and thus the constant feeling of being in His presence. **Likewise, the words of the Prophet Elijah: "As the Lord of hosts lives, before whom I stand"** (1 Kings 18:15), **and those of the righteous Joseph when the wife of his master Potiphar pressed on him to sin with her "How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?"** (Genesis 39:9).

We may be surprised from the words of Joseph! After what happened to him at the hands of his brothers he did not say: "Where is God? If God is there, then why has He forsaken me and let my brothers do what they did and sell me as a slave when I am a son of Jacob and a descendant of Abraham and Isaac". Joseph was different, his feeling of being in the presence of God was immense, that is how he was rescued from a cruel temptation and a fatal sin.

We wish to add a point here, that the hard circumstances of life, its strong currents, desires and difficult temptations push many people who are not established in the love of God, to abandon the Christian principles. Some end by stealing, accepting bribes, cheating or embezzling, and some end in leaving their faith entirely in fear of something or for running after the flesh and the world. What leads people to such behaviour is not the pressure of the world alone, but more their lack of love for Christ.

From the time of the Apostles, the believers were subjected to such pressures and more, and in spite of that, nothing could alter their faith or shift them from their love to God which is in Christ Jesus. Let us listen to the Apostle Paul saying to the Corinthians "To the present hour we both hunger and thirst, and we are poorly clothed, and beaten, and homeless. And we labor, working with our own hands. Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure; being defamed, we entreat" (1 Corinthians 4:11-13). He also said about himself and about the believers: "We stand in jeopardy every hour" (1 Corinthians 15:30) and said that he dies daily (1 Corinthians 15:31).

There is no explanation for that except that love bears all things for the sake of the beloved and endures all things (1 Corinthians 13:7). **Moreover, these pressures and difficulties result in victory for those who love God: "Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us"** (Romans 8:37).

7 - LOVE OF MAN TO GOD DELIVERS HIM FROM SPIRITUAL THEFTS:

By Spiritual theft we mean anything which can steal your love to God, even if it is good and valid! This is a sensitive and important point, since a thief usually steals when no one is noticing him. He does not steal a house unless he is sure that its inhabitants are absent or asleep. Here the thief is Satan.

We should not disregard this matter since what steals our love to God may be legitimate, such as our love to our parents, wife or children. The Lord Jesus says: "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me" (Matthew 10:37). Beware of anyone or anything that can steal your love to God. It could be a member of your family, money, prestigious position, or a scientific degree which you are studying for. It could be a person whom you befriended for a long time, or pleasures of life which are many these days.

St. Augustine says: "Be careful, else Satan steals you and says to you that God created all things for you to enjoy. The people forget their only creator and neglect Him when they do not use the created things graciously but obscenely. The Apostle described those people by saying: "... who worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, Who is blessed forever" (Romans 1:25).

D) LOVE OF MAN TO GOD AND HIS LOVE TO THE WORLD

The word "world" has three meanings: it means the world in its geographical sense, the world meaning the creation as the Lord Jesus instructed His Disciples saying: "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, ... teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19, 20), and the world meaning sinful desires and worldly evils as the Apostle John says: "For all that is in the world-- the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life-- is not of the Father but is of the world" (1 John 2:16). **What we mean here is the third meaning as the Apostle says: "We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one"** (1 John 5:19).

The Holy Bible speaks clearly about the dangers of loving the world: "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world-- the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life-- is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever" (1 John 2:15-17). And the Apostle James says in an enquiring manner: **"Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God"** (James 4:4).

St. Augustine says: "There are two kinds of love, the love of the world and the love of God. If the love of the world gets hold of us, there is no way that the love of God will be in us. Let go of the love to the world, in order for the love of God to replace it. No one says in his heart that this is not true. The Holy Spirit says that by the Apostle John and nothing could be more truthful: "If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (1 John 2:15). Possess the love of the Father in order to share the inheritance with the Son.

You are a vessel, empty it in order to receive the Holy Spirit. It is good not to love the

world, in order that the Church sacraments would not be for our destruction, instead of being a means to strengthen us for salvation. What strengthen us for salvation is to be rooted in love "a form of godliness" not its image (2 Timothy 3:5). The form of godliness is good and holy, but it is useless without the root.

Do we not throw the severed branch in the fire? Posses the root not the image. But how are you rooted? By possessing love as the Apostle says: "that you, being rooted and grounded in love" (Ephesians 3:17). And how is love rooted in the barren desert of the world, when "all that is in the world-- the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life-- is not of the Father but is of the world" (1 John 2:16), and the question is: Why do I not love what God made?

You either love the mortal things which vanish with time, or you do not love the world and live forever with God. Does the love of the world fold you under its wings? Get hold of Christ fast. For because of you He was mortal in the world, in order for you to live forever. He was mortal on earth without losing His eternity. But you were born mortal and by sin you became mortal. You became mortal by sin, but He was mortal on earth by grace for the forgiveness of sins. What a difference between the two cases, between the criminal and He Who came to visit him! Sometimes, a person goes to visit his imprisoned friend. The two of them sit in the prison cell, but they are totally unlike. One is in the prison cell because of breaking the law, while the other is in the prison cell because of his humanity. Likewise, in our case, we were caught sinning and deserve death, and He in His mercy came down to us as a Saviour and was imprisoned with us".

The Holy Bible makes a clear distinction between the love of God and the love of the world, between light and darkness, as between good and evil. We should not mix between the love of God and the love of the world, and one's own behaviour exhibits his kind of love, whether it is for God or for the world. Solomon says in his songs "Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm; for love is as strong as death" (Song 8:6). The command of Christ is: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind" (Matthew 22:37), and we should not share this love with another, or any worldly matters. But our love to the people should be through our love to God, which sanctifies, strengthens and purifies it.

Two women came to Solomon, King of Israel, over a quarrel. Each of the two women claimed that she was the mother of a living child. As Solomon wanted to give his judgement, he said "Bring me a sword and divide the living child in two, and give half to one, and half to the other". The true mother spoke to the king, for she yearned with compassion for her son; and she said, "O my lord, give her the living child, and by no means kill him!" But the other said, "Let him be neither mine nor yours, but divide him". So the king answered and said, "Give the first woman the living child, and by no means kill him; she is his mother" (1 Kings 3:16-27). The untrue mother did not care if the child died. But the true mother accepted only to see her son alive and well. **Likewise, God wants the heart of man and his total love. But Satan, because he is a thief, is happy with whatever he can get.**

Many may ask: "How can a person live in the world without loving and dealing with it?"

St. Augustine says "Love God and do what you like". In this case you will not do what you want, but what God wants, for "the love of Christ compels us" (2 Corinthians 5:14), as the Apostle says. Let your love to God be first, and then you will know what to do not to offend it. Friendship with the world is enmity with God (James 4:4), and often Christ is wounded in the house of His friends (Zechariah 13:6). Let us beware that "because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold" (Matthew 24:12).

E) WHERE DOES LOVE OF MAN TO GOD SHOW?

Where does the love of man to God show?

a) In his love to God more than his love to anyone or anything, even if it were pure or legitimate. We spoke about this point previously.

b) In his love to all creation, especially, mankind. We also mentioned this point before, and we shall elaborate on it in the next chapter.

c) In sharing the suffering of Christ. Sharing the suffering and difficulties of another person, or bearing his afflictions, shows the love to this person. Christ has completed the Redemption on the Cross, but His suffering is not completed up till now. St. Paul said to the Colossians: "I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church" (Colossians 1:24).

The believers in Christ fill up His afflictions up till now. In His message to the minister of the Church of Ephesus, the Lord Jesus said: "**I know your works, your labor, your patience, ... and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary**" (Revelation 2:2, 3). The Lord Jesus made from carrying the cross, a characteristic of discipleship by following Him. When does a man carry the cross? Christ says : "daily" (Luke 9:23), and when do we carry the cross in the true and spiritual meaning? Everywhere, and in all occasions. It is the live testimony that we are His disciples and we follow Him "and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

All the afflictions which comes to the believer, as long as they are not because of his sins,

are for the sake of Christ, whether they are spiritual or physical. The Lord Jesus foretold us saying: "And you will be hated by all for My name's sake" (Matthew 10:22), and it is clear that this hate is not because of an iniquity we committed, but "for His name's sake".

d) In serving Christ: Service in general, in the spiritual meaning, is the practical expression of the love of man to God. Christ completed His Redemption on the Cross, and established the Church on the day of Pentecost. But He left the task of extending His Kingdom on earth to His Disciples, and to those who are disciples at their hands. We say every day in the Lord's Prayer which Christ taught us: "Thy Kingdom come"!

Service or ministry is not a monopoly for a group of people, nor it is of one kind. The Apostle Paul says: "There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord" (1 Corinthians 12:4, 5).

The ministry of teaching is only one of many kinds of ministries. **We do not exaggerate if we say there are countless kinds of ministries. Ministry could be a nice word of comfort to someone, consoling a sad person, helping a person in his difficulties, or giving a sincere advice. We should understand that ministry in any form, is an expression of love. Hence, a loving person knows how to minister well, contrary to a person who lacks love and has many gifts.** The Apostle Paul says: "through love serve one another" (Galatians 5:13) and points in his Epistle to the Thessalonians "their work of faith, and labor of love" (1 Thessalonians 1:3). **As we serve our brethren, we serve God "inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me" (Matthew 25:40).**

F) VIRTUES RELATED TO LOVE OF MAN TO GOD

We mentioned earlier that all virtues are connected to the virtue of love. We said that love in comparison to other virtues resembles the string of a rosary which goes through all the beads, to make from them one unit. For this reason the Apostle Paul calls love "the bond of perfection" (Colossians 3:14). We shall speak about some basic virtues such as humility, purity of heart, patience, longsuffering and giving in their relation to the love of man to God.

1 - HUMILITY:

Humility and love go hand in hand and support one another. St. Augustine says:

"Where love is, there is peace, and where humility is, we find love". St. John El-Dargy says: "There is nothing more superior than humility and love, for God exalts the lowly (Luke 1:52) and love keeps the exaltation, as the Apostle says: "love never fails and never ceases (1 Corinthian 13:8).

Humility strengthens and supports our love to God. When one realizes his many sins and bad character, and also senses that God is still faithful in His love and care for him, the feeling of humility and lowliness inflames his heart with the love of God. Such feelings inflamed the fire of love to God in the hearts of many saints, and still move many others to this splendid aim.

If humility is an important factor in supporting love, love in turn strengthens humility and supports it. This seems so in our relation with God and with people. Our feeling of the strong and deep love of God to us, makes us more lowly. On the other hand, our humility induces the love of God to us. The same thing happens with our relation with others.

2 - PURITY OF HEART:

The Lord Jesus in His sermon on the mount blessed the pure in heart, for they shall see God (Matthew 5:8), and the Psalmist says: "Who may ascend into the hill of the Lord? Or who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart" (Psalm 24:3, 4). The pure heart is the heart which is purified from sin and transgression, and bears the fruits of the Spirit. The first fruit of the Holy Spirit is love (Galatians 5:22). **And if the Lord Jesus blessed the pure in heart for they shall see God, seeing God needs first of all love, because God is love.**

3 - PATIENCE AND LONGSUFFERING:

Love of man to God and also our love to others - does not show itself except by patience and longsuffering, since love bears all things (1 Corinthians 13:7). Besides, love makes it easier for us to bear difficulties, pains and troubles. For the sake of the love of God, one is ready to accept pains and all its consequences. The Apostle Paul says: "For Your sake we are killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us" (Romans 8:36, 37).

We have an excellent example in the Old Testament in the marriage of Jacob (the father of the tribes) to Rachel. When Jacob wanted to marry Rachel, his uncle Laban asked Jacob to first serve him for seven years. Jacob did, and the Bible says: "So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed only a few days to him because of the love he had for her" (Genesis 29:20). The story did not end here, because Laban deceived Jacob and made Jacob marry Leah, Rachel's older sister. Again when Jacob requested to marry Rachel, Laban asked him to serve

another seven years, and Jacob did. So, Jacob served his uncle Laban fourteen years for his great love to Rachel.

4 - GIVING:

Giving is tied to love, and when we speak about giving we do not mean material giving only, but giving in all its forms. We do not exaggerate when we say that material giving is the lowest kind of giving. Giving consists of different levels, from material giving to giving one's time and effort, until, for some people, it amounts to giving of self when one dedicates himself totally to God, such as living the life of chastity in monasticism, or the ministry of priesthood in the world, or being dedicated in one form or the other.

God does not accept our giving and offerings unless they are done in love: "If a man would give for love all the wealth of his house, it would be utterly despised" (Song 8:7). The Apostle Paul says: "And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing" (1 Corinthians 13:3). The beloved Apostle John relates between giving and love: "**But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth**" (1 John 3:17, 18).

The Apostle Paul says: "So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Corinthians 9:7). **No doubt that cheerful giving shows what is in the heart of the giver from his love to God**, because as he gives to someone, he feels that he gives to God Himself.

There are many stories in Church history which show us that the more one loves God, the more he increases his giving. **We mention here one of these stories which is about St. Peter the worshipper.**

ST. PETER THE WORSHIPPER:

He started his life harsh in his dealings, and extremely miser and mean and people called him the merciless. One day a poor man came asking him for alms and he refused him, but the poor man continued asking him. It happened that the servant of the rich man arrived carrying loaves of bread. So he took one loaf and threw it in the face of the poor, aiming to hit him not to be merciful to him. But the poor man bent down, took the bread and went away.

The Lord wanted to change the heart of the rich man from his great love of money. That night, he saw a dream, as if it was the day of judgement and he was standing in front of the angels.

He had no good deeds except the loaf of bread with which he hit the poor man. He woke up terrified and trembling from his dream and kept thinking and blaming himself for his ruthlessness.

This was how his meanness and nastiness changed to great mercy, **to the extent that after he distributed all his wealth to the poor, he did not find anything else to give except his robe. So he sold it and gave its price to the poor.** It was said that when he did not find anything else, he left his town, sold himself as a slave and gave the price to the poor.

When the news of his virtues spread, he went to the Sheheit Desert and spent the rest of his life in ascetic worshipping. That prepared him to know the time of his departure from this world. The Coptic Church celebrates his feast on 25 of the Coptic month of Tobah every year.

G) MARRIAGE SUPPER OF THE LAMB

While we speak about the love of man to God, we ask about the reward of this love.

St. John in the Book of Revelation says: "Then a voice came from the throne, saying, "Praise our God, all you His servants and those who fear Him, both small and great!" And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thundering, saying, "Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns! **Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready**". And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. Then he said to me, "Write: **Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!**" And he said to me, "These are the true sayings of God" (Revelation 19:5-9).

What does the call to the marriage supper of the Lamb mean? Its meaning is beyond any expression or thought. All the joy and happiness in this world do not compare with the marriage supper of the lamb. It is the great jubilee of love. The King of kings and Lord of lords makes the supper of His marriage with the bride of His love which is the Church and her members. Countless number of angels, thousands and tens of thousands, come to serve: "Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?" (Hebrews 1:14). These angels ministered to people on earth, and now do the same in heaven.

Who is this bride which was given to sit beside the Lord Jesus the slain Lamb? How beautiful and amazing she is? The blood of the Lamb converted sinners and they now form His bride and they carry His image and sit with Him.

In this inexpressible glory the bride is as if in a dream. But because of her true love, she can only look to her beloved - the Lamb Who is in the middle of the throne - her Groom. There are praises by the angels and heavenly hosts, but she does not listen except to one voice, that of her Groom, the King of kings. **Now she can stay with Him forever and can see Him face to face. She now realizes His glory which was as in a mirror** (2 Corinthians 3:18). On earth she used to see in a mirror, dimly, but now face to face (1 Corinthians 13:12). **The train to heaven took the bride to the last station, the greatest one, the station of love.**

She will see the Groom in His glory: "fairer than the sons of men" (Psalm 45:2). He will tell her "How fair is your love, my sister, my spouse!" (Song 4:10).

When the bride remembers her past and realizes that her Groom is the King of the kings of the earth, she falls at His feet worshipping Him. But He raises her up to sit beside Him: "And the glory which You gave Me I have given them" (John 17:22). **She is His bride about whom is said: "at Your right hand stands the queen in gold from Ophir"** (Psalm 45:9). **The bride realizes all that by her love to her Groom. Who can now recognize the previous sinner in the person of this bride? She puts on the dress of the queen in white linen, crowned by the crown of righteousness, in place of the humility and shame suffered for His sake, in patience, lowliness and love, as she carried the cross joyfully and followed Him all the way.**

It is a great joy for the Heavenly Father to see the fruits of the sufferings of His Beloved Son. His bride are those who were the sinners, but now they carry the image of His Son Who gave Himself for them, and died for their sake. He freed them from the grip of sin and its power, so that they reflect the glory of the Creator. All of them are the sinners whom the love of the Son of God transformed into saints, their first virtue was love.

Blessed is he who can stand in the presence of the Lord that day. His great love qualifies him for this inexpressible glory, by the power of Redemption completed on the Cross at Golgotha. Indescribable glory is for the redeemed. They came from the great tribulation and washed their clothes and whitened them in the blood of the Lamb. "Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple. And He who sits on the throne will dwell among them. They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat; for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes" (Revelation 7:15-17).

Lord, what a glory! It is the everlasting life which you promised all those who love You.